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ABSTRACT

Research in small enterprises (SEs) and schools in South Australia (SA) and New South Wales (NSW) ascertained differences and similarities in approach to structured workplace learning (SWL). Data were analyzed to identify critical exemplars of good practice in SWL in SEs. In each state, 4 high school SWL programs with SEs were selected; 41 students were interviewed in small groups; 18 staff were interviewed; and 26 SE personnel were interviewed across 8 industry sectors. Key themes from SE employers were understanding of SWL and training system reforms; characteristics required of students; learning; length of SWL placements; benefits for SEs and students; continuing with SWL programs; and greater involvement in SWL. Key themes from schools were strong interest in vocational education and training (VET); impact of the introduction of VET; SWL versus work experience; priority given to SWL; positive learning experiences; student-learned lessons; what employers are looking for; schools' contributions to SWL; impact of log books; negative learning experience; and barriers. A theoretical framework was developed that provided a model moving SWL away from its narrow perspective into a whole of community and adult enterprise learning framework. Application of the action research process to a learning partnerships model resulted in this cycle: diagnosing, action planning, workplace action, evaluating, and specifying learning. (Contains 58 references.) (YLB)

Learning from small enterprise structured work placement

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Recent research in Sydney and Adelaide has pointed to the need for re-thinking student placement in small businesses. Employer / business owners point to their lack of input to school curriculum and methodology, with the consequent mismatch of student learning and business needs. Student vocational education and training (VET) program and Training Package requirements are most unlikely to be met in this currently school-driven model. The authors point to emerging models of good practice that allow for and encourage more employer and student input, while shifting the focus of the on-the-job training to a more action learning model centred on developing enterprise and generic employability skills.

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Small enterprises in Australia provide substantial employment (approximately 65%) for young Australians and represent about 90% of all enterprises in Australia (Robinson 1999, p 3) and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future.

With the structural changes to Australia's training system, very little is actually known about the relationship VET (and in particular, structured workplace learning - SWL) may be generating between schools and small enterprises. Apart from a study conducted by Smith et al (1996), there has been very little research of small enterprise training demands and their support (if any) of structured work placements for school-age adolescents.

Small enterprises and the vocational education sector have very different goals, methods and practices (Harris et al 1997). Research into (apparent) successful partnerships between schools and small enterprises in relation to SWL may result in the development of good practice models, and a theoretical framework for SWL that supports schools and small enterprises to work together to improve the relevance of schooling to workplace practices.

In any discussion about small enterprise workplace learning, it is important to articulate what is meant by SWL. In their review of the literature, Cummings and Carbines (1997) suggest the following about workplace learning and structured work placements respectively:

Learning that occurs in workplaces. Workplace learning is commonly used synonymously with structured workplace learning or structured work placements. It is commonly contrasted with work experience, from which industry-determined predefined learning outcomes and assessments are absent.

Periods of workplace learning in which defined learning outcomes have been set down for students to achieve while they are in the workplace. These learning outcomes commonly reflect industry-defined competency standards. Structured work placements normally require these pre-determined outcomes to be formally assessed. Structured work placements are commonly contrasted to work experience, in which industry-determined pre-defined learning outcomes and assessment are absent.

A more detailed definition comes from MCEETYA (1997):

There are a range of stakeholders in the delivery of structured workplace learning to secondary students. At the state/territory and national levels, stakeholders include ITABs, industry associations, area consultative committees, education authorities, while at the **local level** the immediate stakeholders are employers/workplace supervisors, schools/providers, program coordinator and industry-education advisory committees.

Methodology

The research was conducted in small enterprises and schools in South Australia (SA) and New South Wales (NSW) to ascertain differences and similarities in approach to SWL and the impact of public policy (via public education) in establishing effective partnerships between schools and small enterprises. The study was limited to the metropolitan area only at the request of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). The data collected were analysed to identify 'critical exemplars' (Gibson 1997) of good practice in school workplace learning in small enterprises. These 'critical exemplar' indicators were used to construct the case studies of good practice.

In each state, four high school SWL programs with small enterprises were selected for the study on the recommendation of the respective education departments' response to support schools to be a part of the study. A total of 41 students were interviewed, generally in small groups of three to five students. This method was chosen as the researchers thought the young people would add to each others' comments and provide a better overview of what actually happens than if interviewed in isolation. In discussion, the young people reported being more comfortable with their peers and more willing to discuss a broader range of issues than if they were on their own.

A total of 18 staff who had major responsibility for VET in the schools or who were administering the project which was the subject of this study were individually interviewed. Additionally, where possible, the principals of the schools in the study were also interviewed.

A much larger number of small enterprises were involved in the study. Once a school SWL program involved with small enterprises was identified, the study attempted to interview a representative of each enterprise. On most occasions the person responsible for the supervision of students on work placement was interviewed. A total of 26 small enterprise personnel were interviewed across eight industry sectors.

Literature review summary

A national and international literature review was undertaken of contemporary (last five years) research and supporting texts and journal articles related to VET in schools – workplace learning projects and exemplars. While the study found much literature related to school-based VET and SWL programs, there is little real connection to small enterprises other than as a site for students to complete a placement.

As Ryan (1997), in reviewing the research literature, put it:

There is a substantial body of literature on vocational education in schools but, while extensive, it is characterised more by pamphlets, pronouncements, manifestos and ministerial statements than by research findings, even in the broadest sense of the term. However, sufficient material of substance exists to identify some firm conclusions and a range of emerging issues.

The literature reviewed in relation to SWL identified a diversity of emerging issues. Roberts (1994) talks of mentoring as a methodology for small enterprises to combat youth unemployment and to ensure a greater take up of small business careers by such young people. Childs (1997) builds on this approach by proposing learning partnerships where small enterprise work is seen as curriculum and all participants are learners who mutually benefit from pooling their competence and experience. A strong cyclical impact in work-based entry level training on trends in skill formation is identified by Lundberg (1997).

Roberts (1995) adds to the work of Connell et al's *Making the difference* (1982) in finding cultural reproduction to be evident, particularly where school and family values match. Importantly for this research, he indicates an emerging role for workplace learning as an intervention stratagem reaching both reproduction and economic effects on working class youths who don't fit the system.

The career pathways approach of Cowan (1996) argues that business and educators should work together to help teachers bring workplace relevance to their classrooms and provide lessons developed by both. Bagnall (1996) takes this further in a research project on workplace learning within small enterprises in the field of tourism, with an analysis of the nature and ethical implications of embeddedness (as education and training) in the workplace, arising from contemporary convergent influences.

Competencies within workplace knowledge are a feature of research by Bevan (1996) to identify workplace skills and knowledge required by small enterprise owner-operators in the tourism-hospitality field. Middleton (1996) discusses the extent to which problem-solving competencies are generic and applicable to all workplace settings, while Kanis (1996) argues that generic competencies within workplace vocational knowledge are bound to specific contents. Cumming and Carbines (1997) discuss connections and relationships established between schools and their communities and argue that such projects have a potential to influence the wider context of community development, and on a much larger scale. Bringing the community into the school, authenticating learning environments beyond the school and generating new forms of partnerships will require ongoing school reform.

Morgan (1994) articulates that small enterprises' chief concern is to recycle their current workforce and not to participate in school-to-work transition programs. Employers cite the lack of appropriate screening, the need for greater application of skills required by employers and the need for greater flexibility to improve the incentive to study for non college-based students. A second study by Morgan (1994) found employers praised the quality and contributions of young workers.

Childs (1997), and to a lesser extent Kelleher and Murray (1996), refer to action learning as another response to what small enterprises need in workplace learning. Childs suggests a very different view of curriculum from that defined by schools, and points to a much more challenging and potentially rewarding model that would require a closer relationship between school and the workplace. She also discusses a Certificate III in Business New Enterprise Formation that uses action learning as a basis for enterprise development. The certificate is action-based rather than curriculum-based learning, and builds in small business real time and real contexts as an 'implicit rather than accidental philosophy of the learning program'. The certificate is the first of its kind in Australia and creatively interprets national qualification standards.

In Australia, the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) has published a variety of descriptions of school industry programs (for example, Ainley and Fleming 1997). Athanasou (1996) discusses the Australian experience:

School-based cooperative vocational education in Australia is of recent origin and no more than about six years old. It involves structured school and work programs that allow students to learn in occupations related to a field of study and attend school during the same time period. This combination of school and work has evolved:

- (a) in response to significant changes in the efforts of students completing secondary schooling
- (b) as an attempt to foster experiential learning
- (c) to help young people learn specific skills and knowledge related to their course work; and
- (d) to assist them in order to qualify for a full-time job or further education.

He also recognises that there are two noticeable differences in Australian school-based vocational programs from overseas experiences. Australian students attend workplaces voluntarily and they are able to access dual accreditation (that is, state secondary certificates of completing high school and industry-specific training qualifications).

Wyatt and Rush-Matthews (1996) point to the need for more substantial and detailed research to enable a clearer picture of small and medium enterprise (SME) demand for training. They also illustrate the lack of sensitivity to SME needs shown by training providers. Smith et al (1996) agree that there is little industry-specific knowledge of SME training needs and that there will be a wide variance in the requests for support depending on industry, economic cycle and individual SME age and development criteria. Harris et al (1998) confirm the very different goals of small enterprises and educational institutions, while pointing to the need for publicly funded VET providing institutions to build closer partnerships with small business.

The Karpin Report (1995) provided an overview of literature since the 1980s, describing why small business is resistant to training and the failure of training providers to meet its needs. Amongst the reasons were the fact that training

programs were too general and not targeted to small enterprise needs, small enterprise lacked conviction that training was useful, and the usual issues of time, quality of training and cost (Gibb 1997).

A case study of an Australian example is that of Patterson (1992). The study emphasises two points of focus: credit transfer arrangements for Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) advice programs, and identification of the need for work education and careers advice programs in years 7-10 to ensure that the full range of post-school pathways is understood. In support of this focus, the Taskforce on Pathways in Education and Training (1992) concluded that despite some cooperative arrangements, the sectors of our education and training system operate too much as separate worlds. That separateness, coupled with some industrial, cultural and financial rigidities, means valuable community resources are under-utilised. Change is needed within the sectors as well. The approaches suggested include cooperative education agreements between schools and employers, youth apprenticeships (paid), employer mentoring, integration of work-based and school-based learning, and integration of academic and vocational learning.

Key themes from small enterprises

The range of small enterprises included hospitality, retail, office management, finance, telecommunications, clubs (for example, golf, bowls, service), furniture construction and food preparation. The following key themes emerged from these interviews with the small enterprise employers.

Understanding of SWL

The pressure of 'time' and the 'inability to have worthwhile dialogue' with schools and employer associations (hospitality, telecommunications, furniture construction) were the main reasons put forward why small enterprises were unsure of actually what defines SWL.

Understanding of reforms associated with the Australian training system

While there is a considerable wealth of information available about the Australian training system, most small enterprises do not have the time to digest it fully or understand their place in it.

Characteristics required by the students

Small enterprises reported that the characteristics they were looking for in students included: 'a willingness to learn' (all); 'commitment' (service, hospitality, retail); 'a responsible attitude' (hospitality, finance, service); 'motivation' (all); 'problem-solving and cooperation' (hospitality); an 'open and observing mind' (service, finance); 'a strong sense of personal integrity' (service); 'wanting to be there, showing initiative and asking questions' (retail, hospitality); and 'being prepared to work' (all).

Learning

Whilst employers acknowledge 'the time students are in the workplace limits how much they learn, as does the level of skill they bring to the job initially' (hospitality, retail, finance), they are quick to point out that students 'are successful when they want to learn' (hospitality); 'come with a positive attitude' (service, finance); 'listen

clearly to instructions' (furniture construction); and 'enjoy their work' (service). Small enterprises view a positive outlook and a willingness to try new things as fundamentals the students need to bring to the workplace.

Length of time of structured work placements

Employers commented it was important in the negotiations with school personnel to suggest or recommend the best length of time for the work placement to meet their needs as well as those of students. They thought there would not be one preferred model but that individual small enterprises would respond as best they could.

Benefits for small enterprises

The benefits for the small enterprises included: 'a recruitment tool' (hospitality, retail, service); 'a sense of community obligation because many kids miss out' (hospitality, service, furniture construction); employers got 'a free look at potential employees' (service); 'students take some of the strain from the day to day workload' (hospitality, service); and it was great 'to have an extra pair of hands' (hospitality). Other employers who 'had difficult personal experiences of their own, felt empathy for the students' situations and were keen to help out where they could' (service, hospitality, retail, finance).

Benefits for students through participation in SWL

All interviewed employers responded positively about the benefits for students. Comments included: 'hands on experience' (hospitality, retail, food preparation); 'exposure to new work' (finance, telecommunications); 'experience of real life in the world of work' (all); 'understanding of the need for punctuality' (service, hospitality); 'responsibility that comes from working in a team situation is realised' (retail, office, service); 'improvements in attitude toward work and achieving goals' (service, food preparation); and 'an increased realisation that independence is important in the workplace' (service, retail), as workers are not always totally supervised.

Continuing with SWL programs

Most employers indicated that, despite their limited understanding of the Australian training system (in particular structured work placements) and their belief that benefits mostly flowed to students and schools, they were prepared to continue with work placement programs.

Greater involvement in SWL

Most small enterprise representatives claimed that greater involvement by them in the establishment and planning of SWL would be of benefit (subject to time constraints), though the advantage was seen to be mostly to the student or school.

Key themes from schools

The researchers consulted with two different sets of stakeholders within the eight participating schools in NSW and SA. Students were interviewed in small groups to facilitate open dialogue and support, and add value to the comments of each other. School administrators (eg principals, VET coordinators - both regional and school-based) were interviewed individually. A range of themes emerged from the research and the following is a summary of the findings from the school perspective.

Strong interest in vocational education and training

School administrators in both states strongly believed in vocational education programs and were keen to take up any new opportunities for increasing their students' exposure to vocational options and structured work placements that were directly relevant to their students' courses.

Impact of the introduction of vocational education and training in schools

VET is having a significant impact in schools. While much of it has been positive there are also indications of concerns. Administrators in both states indicated 'change in schools was shufflingly slow, with the existence of real structural impediments to change'.

Structured workplace learning is different from work experience

Both school administrators and students generally agree that SWL is far better than the (older) notions of work experience.

Priority given to SWL

The negative views expressed by school personnel were about status, legalities, time and difficulties in managing students. On the positive side, schools reported that 'structured workplace learning was seen to enhance the image of the school in the community'.

Positive learning experiences

On the whole, students reported positive learning experiences whilst on structured work placements.

Lessons learnt by students

Students reported on lessons they had learnt from their involvement in SWL. Their comments strongly reflected that the key lessons were about workplace relations rather than technical tasks.

What employers are looking for

From the school perspective, the prevalent belief is that employers are looking for people who are 'flexible'.

Schools' contribution to SWL

In both states, school personnel strongly believed that schools were making a major contribution to the development of SWL in their communities.

Impact of log books

Both students and teachers believed that logbooks provide structure to VET and provide a focus to small enterprises on what, and how, to assess students. Students were impressed with the logbooks and thought they provided the structure that employers wanted and the articulation of the steps they needed to follow to be successful. Indications of their support of the log book are reflected in the following comments.

Negative learning experience

Although students were generally positive about the learning experiences of SWL, most of their negative comments are related to repetitive tasks, narrowly based opportunities, or inappropriate placements given student interests or prior work experiences.

Barriers to overcome

School administrators often felt frustrated with small enterprises whom they believed still saw work experience as the desired outcome. Despite efforts to teach/convince employers about changes in the training system, it seemed entrenched views were hard to move forward.

Schools have a strong interest in VET and believe it has had an impact. They also recognise they have a long way to go if SWL is to be a major priority of academic and vocational courses. While schools continue to use work experience, there is a growing need to educate their staff, and personnel in small enterprises, to move into SWL with its focus on learning and work competencies.

Case studies of good practice

Information gathered from the many workplace learning situations was analysed and synthesised into three exemplars illustrating different aspects of good practice.

Exemplar 1: Information technology, small business and school links project

The foundation of this exemplar is a recognition of three factors. First, small business often does not have the skills or knowledge to understand or apply new information technology applications to its operations, and that in the day-to-day operation of the business there is not the time to learn these skills when under the pressure of running the business. Second, there are a number of information technology applications that can be applied to small business to enhance its profitability and to modernise the business. The ramifications of enhanced profitability may result in new employment possibilities being opened up. Third, schools have students who have well developed information technology skills in a range of applications that are relevant to the successful operation of a small business enterprise. These students would therefore benefit by the application of these skills in a real work environment and, through a process of also understanding the operation of small business, would improve their employability in the labour market.

Exemplar 2: The brokerage model - informing the theory and practice of VET

A project has been established as a regional pilot to broker workplace learning and VET between the schools and small business. The project has a mix of staff from small business and education backgrounds. The intersection of the skills and backgrounds of the staff creates a dynamic work environment, where understandings are further enhanced and where it is possible to create new strategies to further workplace learning. At the local and regional level, the project is working to forge partnerships between the schools and small business enterprises.

Exemplar 3: Partnerships - VET and small enterprise training

A community has forged a formal memorandum of understanding between schools, TAFE and small enterprises. The aim of the partnership is to help young people build the best foundations for the future by providing them with opportunities to experience careers that interest them. The project has a formal structure outside of the school environment and is a registered training organisation (RTO). It was formed initially to improve vocational education in the region.

Development of a theoretical framework

Schools, education systems and business representatives are endeavouring to sort out the shape of workplace learning, often without having any broad understanding of **why** they are engaged in the activity, **how** to measure it, **how** to evaluate the outcomes, and **what** it might look like in their own context. Schools have not sufficiently developed or been given the tools to use to fully accredit the learning that takes place in the workplace, and not all parties are actively engaged in effective dialogue leading to resolution of these issues at the local level. Small enterprises are becoming increasingly disillusioned in trying to navigate through changes in policy and programs in this area with little support. Students may still have outdated notions of workplace learning as being the same as work experience, and some have not recognised the opportunities that workplace learning can present.

Structured workplace learning is part of a learning environment

In a student-centred pedagogy, the pivotal stakeholder is the student (see Figure 1). This concept of education allows the student to relate what he or she is studying in the school environment with what is learnt from the work placement. In general terms the workplace is meant to provide some *experience* which would give the student some *understanding*. These *experiences* and *understandings* are often conceptualised in very broad generic terms, with little process for linking back into the school to inform the curriculum.

Figure 1: A model of student-centred pedagogy

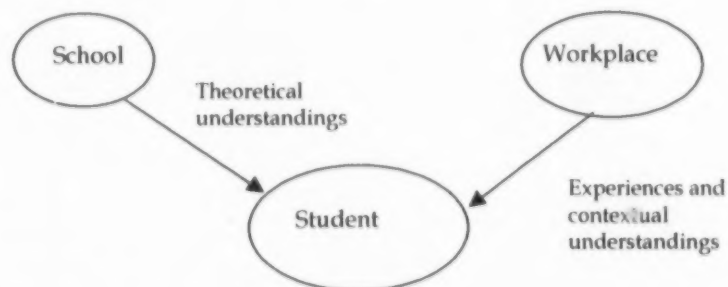
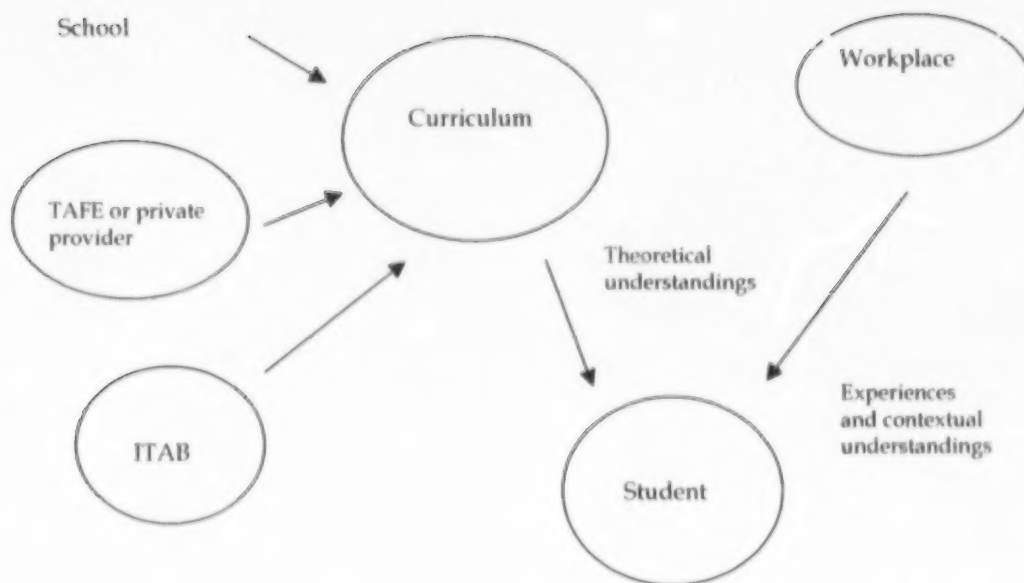


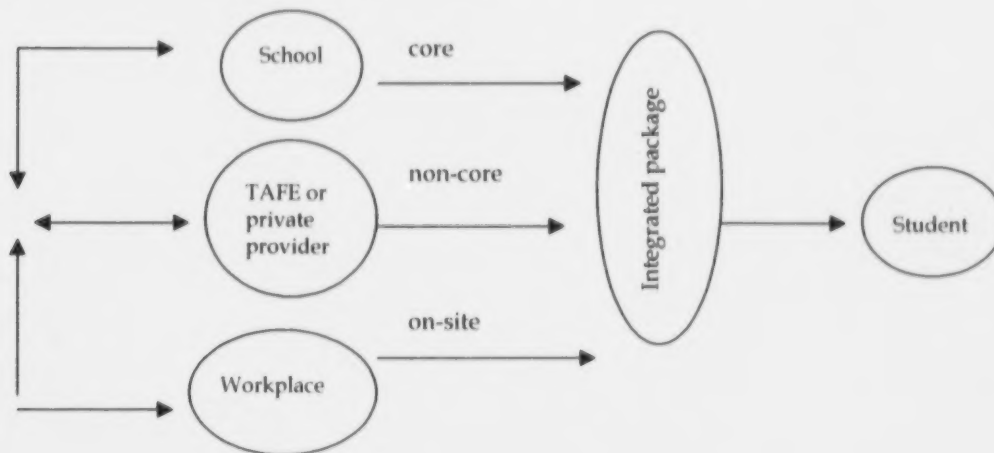
Figure 2: An adapted model of school, student, TAFE, ITAB, business and industry





In the Figure 2 model, the student can develop industry-specific competencies that have been learnt in the workplace. The clarification of what competencies have been developed in the workplace, the school and TAFE, have been carved up between the stakeholders, and all that is required is for the student to learn these competencies and be assessed by each of the parties to varying degrees to gain accreditation. The model in Figure 3 has the potential to provide SWL which gives all stakeholders a role in the design, delivery and assessment of the learning that occurs. However, it is most beneficial when utilised with big business which has the training resources to be involved, or with a representative association of employers (as in the case of the Motor Traders Association).

Figure 3: School, student and workplace linkages



An initial local level partnership - what is the benefit to the small business?

At a local level it becomes more possible for schools to develop links with small enterprises which can inform the design of workplace learning. There are, however, implications for the resourcing, training and involvement of both parties. If these barriers can be overcome, there exists a possibility for schools and small businesses to form local level partnerships, where the small business can have an input into what its role may be in the students' learning and the benefit of providing workplace learning. Further development of these models at a local level would need to begin to blur the boundaries that separate the school and the workplace.

We are in small enterprises, thank you - a more developed model

With 32% of small enterprises not surviving the first year and only 8% surviving past ten years, the interest of these businesses in, and the time that they can allocate to, workplace learning must be regarded as minimal at best, within the current paradigm.

The prime function of any business at a micro level is to make money; to remain in business. However, the relationship between the school, the student and the small enterprise has to be seen in a radically different light.

There is a need to examine ways in which the student or the school can *value add* to the prime role of the small enterprise, in the same way as the small enterprise is asked to value add to the student's learning and meet the requirements of the prime function of the school in provision of student education and links to the labour market. The first step in this direction is to come to view the student as an active participant in the process. The student brings skills, attributes, attitudes and outside knowledge to the workplace that can enhance the operation of the small enterprise.

In business terminology, there is a *transaction* occurring which can have mutual benefit.

What the small enterprise can offer:

- a more personal and supportive work environment conducive to mentoring
- knowledge about the operation of the small enterprise as a whole entity
- product knowledge
- links to other small enterprises and local networks
- an opportunity to develop enterprise skills of a generic nature
- practical experience of the world of work
- possible future traineeship or apprenticeship opportunities.

What the school can offer:

- a pool of skilled young people who can value add to the enterprise
- community recognition for participating small enterprises
- accreditation for the student
- staff support to the student and the small enterprise
- management of the placement
- information about various VET initiatives, traineeship and apprenticeship programs and possible wage subsidies
- assistance with assessment processes and instruments
- access to different community networks for the small enterprise
- back up and support of a large school community.

What the student can offer:

- another pair of hands to the operation of the small enterprise or a particular product
- skills and knowledge that may not currently exist within the small enterprise (for example, IT and graphic design skills)
- staffing to overcome a temporary problem facing the small enterprise
- an outside and youthful perspective on the operation of the small enterprise
- product design, development and marketing ideas.

In using this notion of a business transaction, the benefits to each player can be clearly documented and all parties are engaged in a learning partnership which can be an active and ongoing process.

The missing stakeholder - refining the partnership and the transaction

Schools, small enterprises and students are not operating in a vacuum where learning occurs in isolation from other dynamics. The student learns from family, peers and a whole range of community structures as well as the school and the workplace environment. The school and the small enterprise operate within a community context which is the milieu of their operation. If the community is severely socially disadvantaged with high levels of welfare dependency, then the expectations of the school, the student and the small enterprise can be significantly lowered. The transaction between the stakeholders is consequently diminished. All four parties need to be viewed as a part of the transaction with an analysis of the benefit to each party, and all are part of a learning partnership. To be stakeholders in a learning partnership, each party needs to identify why they are participating, what they bring to the transaction, how they propose to undertake it and what they potentially gain from it.

This model of a learning partnership between the stakeholders has the potential to rejuvenate communities and develop enterprising communities where all sectors of the community have a role to play. The model stresses the importance of the 'transaction' as being pivotal to an analysis of workplace learning, and brings workplace learning back into its relevant context.

Small business and enterprise - what small business wants in employees

Small business is by its very nature enterprising, yet generally the school is not teaching young people enterprise skills. This is central to the relationship between the school and business and industry generally. There is very often a cultural gap in each other's perceptions of what skills and attitudes young people need to have in order to be work ready.

A survey of recruitment practices by Australian companies undertaken by the National Industry Education Forum of the Business Council of Australia in 1995 (Stanton 1995) found the following types of responses to the question 'Could you describe the major competencies/attributes that you look for in recruiting staff from outside the organisation for entry-level positions at non-graduate or management level?':

- interpersonal skills
- initiative, adaptability, flexibility
- hire the smile and attitude and train the rest
- ability to want to learn
- we believe that you can train skills and knowledge, not attitude
- motivated self-starter, initiative, flexibility, independence, drive
- ability to think broadly
- ability to embrace change.

Transition from student-centred pedagogy to adult learning

Workplace learning is a time of transition, when students are moving from one set of learning principles where they have been generally dependent in the learning

process toward a more independent adult learning model. In this time of transition, the student has a foot in both camps. The role of the mentor in this situation is critical. The mentor is the person who assists the transition between learning styles, and in essence assists the young person through a 'rite of passage' into the adult world.

If the student is moving into an adult learning model, then it is also informative to examine the characteristics of an adult learner. Such a model is based on four crucial assumptions (according to Knowles 1984) about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from assumptions about child learners. As persons mature:

- their self-concept moves from being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directing human being;
- they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning;
- their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and
- their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application.

Roles of the stakeholders in a learning partnership

The student needs to have a good understanding of the theory of what they are being taught in the school; to be able to observe the workplace and experiment and apply knowledge in a real context outside the school environment; and to reflect on the experience and to make sense of it. They also need to be able to relate the results of this process back to the school to inform future developments.

The school needs to ensure that what is being taught is capable of being applied and is of relevance in the workplace. They also need to allow for and encourage modification in the light of feedback from students, employers and the community. The school also needs to be involved in active experimentation to advance its theory and knowledge base. The workplace needs to be cognisant of what is being taught in the schools and the extent to which it is relevant in the workplace.

The business also should be prepared to modify and adapt its function in the light of new ideas and emergent technologies.

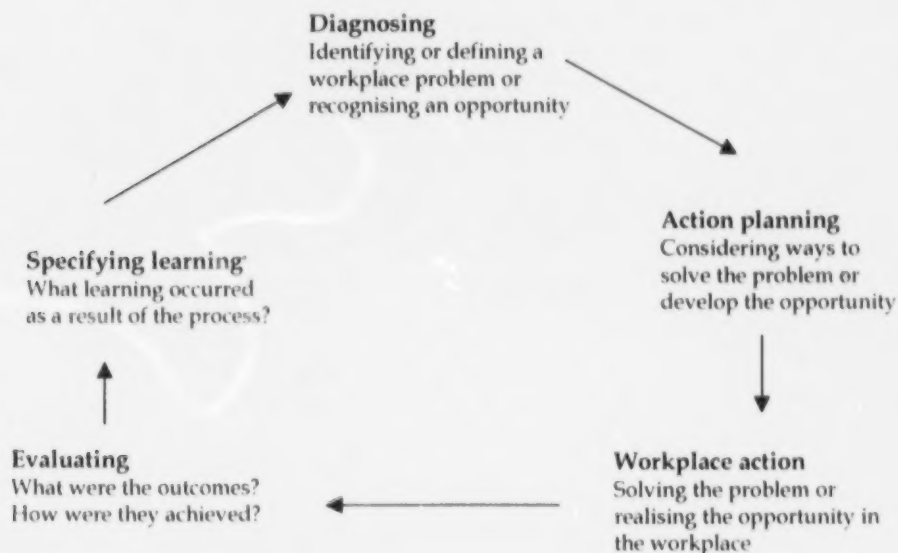
What an enterprising learning partnership could look like

To most effectively market appropriate and relevant skills to small business, enterprise learning seeks to develop competencies in students that comprise some 65% of the Australian workforce - and yet have been the most neglected form of school learning. Enterprise learning cannot be taught in isolation from the experience of the workplace and the community. For enterprise learning to occur, there needs to be a partnership between schools and small business enterprises where theory and practice can be integrated into the student's praxis. The resultant experience of success leads to attitudinal change and development of a range of competencies which enhance the employability of the student.

The action research process

Put simply, action research is *learning by doing* - a group of people (school, small enterprise, community agency, local government, students) identify a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and, if not satisfied, try again. Kemmis (1998) has developed a simple model of the cyclical nature of the typical action research process. Each cycle has four steps: plan, act, observe and reflect. When applied to the learning partnerships that are being proposed, the model could take on a shape as in Figure 4, which involves all the partners in the process and the outcomes of the process.

Figure 4: The action research process applied to a learning partnerships model



Summary

The theoretical framework developed in this section provides a model that moves SWL away from its narrow perspective into a whole of community and adult enterprise learning framework. This study has shown there is an urgent need to further improve the relationships between schools and small enterprises, to foster SWL for young people. The case studies of good practice provide a strong indication of the type of directions that would be taken. The theoretical framework reinforces the need for partnerships within the community.

Authors' note

This paper is a summary of a larger research report which fully analyses the research project 'Small Enterprise Workplace Learning - Links to School Vocational Education', which will be available from NCVER later this year. The researchers were James Mulraney, Peter Turner, Roger Harris, Frank Wyatt and Teri Gibson.

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